

Strategy 4. Invest in e-learning systems that support the development of public workforce development professionals

ETA continues to bear the major responsibility for heading the establishment and maintenance of the state and local workforce development systems of America's Workforce Network. In furtherance of this responsibility, ETA through its e-government effort, can help build communities of world-class workforce development professionals around specialized tools and standardized best practices. Again however, the critical assumption for such an initiative is that, whatever systems are established they must lead to improved service to customers. In the end, staff must feel competent to serve customers and have the tools available to actually improve service. AWN partners also emphasized that they should feel that they have choices in what is delivered to their staffs - that some may choose to serve customers in more traditional ways.

ETA can support the establishment of a technology-based electronic-learning system organized around a virtual "university" construct where

1. high quality training is delivered online to address the skill needs of ETA's partners and their staff;
2. where a certification of competency is the expected outcome of such training;
3. where credentialing is effective and valid;
4. where the collective knowledge of the workforce system is stored, managed and made accessible to all workforce development professionals;
5. where information is gathered and new knowledge created;
6. where state and local agencies may exchange training modules and models;
7. and where distance learning standards can be tested and disseminated
8. where technical assistance is available.

This "University" is used in its broadest context and will use available and emerging technologies to deliver information and training on a 24/7 basis. An electronic learning/distance-education system, in the form of a virtual university, supported by the AWN and integrated into its services, will create, manage, and deliver education and training from repositories of training modules and reusable training objects - a place for the sharing of various models, ideas and products among partners. These will be built in accordance with emerging e-learning standards using advanced technology and offered via both synchronous and asynchronous delivery systems. Supporting a distance learning capability is a good investment for ETA on behalf of AWN. A survey of working adults conducted by Opinion Research Corporation revealed that 54% believed that college courses offered via the Internet are the future of higher education. They also like the flexibility and timesaving afforded by learning online. Distance learning also offers significant economies of scale as a means of developing and delivering of new learning content.

The investment strategy for establishing a learning capability should reflect:

- a review of existing systems and models to identify those that will offer the most to the AWN;
- a thorough investigation of state and local education/training systems for preparing workforce professionals to determine gaps;
- several pilot initiatives to demonstrate strengths/weaknesses of models
- a focus on measurable and successful learning outcomes;
- the desire to customize e-learning products to fit state branding and program specifications;
- the ability to deliver e-learning models, products and services at differing levels of technical sophistication to fit the capacities and progress of state systems;
- assessment and use of existing systems and curriculum.

Imagine this scenario three years from now:

1). Diane is a training specialist working in a large metropolitan area; Joe is an Unemployment Specialist assigned to the same area. They both work under standardized AWN functional Position Descriptions which include competency models addressing the unique requirements for their specialities. Both work out of a One-Stop Career Center located in the suburbs of that metropolitan area. As knowledge workers, both have a wealth of information about their respective product lines. To facilitate the needs of customers being served by the One-Stop, both have taken several cross-training courses offered by AWN Virtual University that provided them with the general knowledge of the others' respective product lines. Their respective jobs may require travel outside of the office. On travel days, it may be necessary for Diane or Joe to cover for each other to ensure proper customer service. The AWN course criteria was set up in a Web accessible environment that allowed them to take and complete the course at their own pace and on their own time. Upon successful completion of the course, each received electronic certification that they had mastered one of the skills in the AWN's competency model for One-Stop front line staff. In addition to better serving their customers, since the job hierarchy of the One-Stop Center is centered around these competencies, Diane and Joe can help advance their own careers by taking these courses.